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REQUEST OF
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COLONIAL SLAVERY.

NINE LETTERS

TO

HIS GRACE

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON

ON

COLONIAL SLAVERY.

BY IGNOTUS.

LONDON :

WILLIAM STRAKER, 61, HOLBORN ; HATCHARD & SON,
PICCADILLY ; AND RICHARD MOORE TIMS,
GRAFTON-ST. DUBLIN.

1830.

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July 1, 1914.

Bequest of

Georgina Lowell Putnam

NINE LETTERS

TO

HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON.

MY LORD,

It hath pleased Divine Providence to place your Grace in one of the most commanding stations which it has ever fallen to the lot of man to fill ; and to give you an influence over the aristocracy of the land, (as the settlement of a late great question, after years of angry disputation, has evinced) such as will excite the wonder, and in many respects, the admiration of future ages. Hitherto, the career of your Grace has been in many respects the most splendid that can be conceived—that of an invincible warrior, the envy of surrounding nations ; and that of a statesman, unrivalled in the boldness of his enterprise. There is, however, yet another victory to be won, and another triumph to be achieved ; one, bloodless in its character, and peaceful in its effects, which it is commonly believed you possess the power of accomplishing, under the blessing of that inscrutable Providence, who hath raised you to your present eminence ; a victory over the prejudices of men, in the instant amelioration of the condition of the Negro Slaves. Do not, my Lord, startle at the mention of a subject so hackneyed

in the present day. The design of these letters is not the development of any Utopian scheme, impracticable, or at variance with the existing institution of the colonies, but a sober, simple, detail of what your Grace may, without either infringing upon the rights of personal property, or of intrenching upon the security of our colonial possessions, at once effect. The design of these letters, is, to lead the comprehensive mind of your Grace to grasp the subject of colonial slavery; to point out the means, in the adoption of which, you may at once confer a lasting blessing on your country; and to impress upon you this simple truth, that your Grace alone, of all men whose high privilege it is to sit in either House of Parliament, possesses the power of bringing to an issue, a question which has distracted hitherto, and ever will continue (till fairly adjusted) to distract the deliberations of the great council of the nation: and this shall be attempted with the utmost brevity.

It is already conceded, that some radical defects exist in the internal government, as well as in the laws, affecting our slave colonial possessions; and that a change of measures is necessary, and loudly called for. On these points, it is, that the colonial legislators and the people of England, are now at issue;—the one, claiming the exclusive right of amelioration, as they think best, and resisting the authority of the parent state; the other, as pertinaciously asserting it to be a duty paramount to every other, at once to overturn the whole fabric of slavery, and reckless of consequences, to blot out its name for ever. In the estimate of moderate men, both parties are wrong. Whilst all will concede, who know any thing of the value of personal liberty, that slavery is a poisonous root, which, like the upas tree, infects with disease and death, and blasts by its pernicious breath, all who are beneath its influence.

But the difficulty lies here, to solve, both how and when this curse of man may, with the prospect of the least ill,

and in the expectation of the greatest ultimate and substantial good, be swept from the earth for ever. In the consideration of this great question, the planter on the one hand, concedes, and is resolved to concede, too little ; whilst the emancipator, on the other hand, asks too much. Thus, the object which each party has in view, is neutralized by the extremes into which both have fallen. How then, my Lord, are these conflicting opinions to be regulated, opinions which threaten the speedy overthrow of the whole West India possessions, but by the collective wisdom of the British Legislature? By it must the subject in the end, be calmly and deliberately weighed on the basis of permanent good ; and from the walls of the British senate house must issue—if ever the knell of slavery be tolled—both the enactments for its amelioration, at present so loudly insisted upon, as well as that charter which shall confirm to the children of deeply wronged Africa, their natural birth right as denizens of the world.

What those ameliorating enactments should be, (preparatory to the ultimate abolition of slavery, which from the very nature of things, and from the events passing in the world, we are warranted in concluding must sooner or later, even without the interference of parliament, take place,) shall, with great deference, be submitted to your Grace in a few letters—wherein the author (who has for several years been an eye witness to things as they exist in the West Indies, yet who disclaims connexion with any party whatsoever) shall, as briefly as possible, advert to them under the following heads,

Administration of Justice,
Negro Evidence,
Compulsory Manumission.
Punishments,
Marriage,
Protection of the Sabbath,
Religious Instruction,
Prospective Emancipation.

These, my Lord, as they form the more prominent subjects of complaint, shall first be noticed : and may the Great Governor of the world, whose outstretched arm hath guarded you in the day of battle, and whose wisdom hath entrusted to your keeping the affairs of a mighty nation, animate your Grace to a generous and a noble zeal in the cause of suffering humanity.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

Your Grace's humble servant,

IGNOTUS.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

MY LORD,

The humanity of the slave-code of the West Indies, and especially of Jamaica, has often been the theme of admiration amongst colonists, and not unfrequently trumpeted forth, as a set-off against those numerous cases of cruelty and oppression which have been alleged against them. Nor can it be denied, that the slave-code of Jamaica contains in it provisions affecting the slave, which, as far as they go, seem to have the most humane tendency. This has ever been the policy of the colonist, to preserve on the face of the statute book, regulations affecting the amelioration of the slave, intended rather to be *politically* than *practically* acted upon—regulations which, when viewed from a distance by the mother country, would lead to the supposition, that the utmost precautions were adopted, which human ingenuity could devise, for the protection of the slave, and the just administration of the laws affecting his happiness. Thus far there has been a semblance of justice. To a certain extent, at least, there has been no unwillingness to legislate. Clause after clause has been appended to the slave-code, but the sentiment so commonly prevailing amongst the colonists themselves, that such an act was passed in order to please the people of England, will readily account why the law, when framed, has so often become obsolete, or a mere dead letter. It is but a few years since a member of the Jamaica Assembly, now no more, (Mr. Stewart, of Telauney) on being a good deal jeered respecting a clause which he proposed introducing into the slave law, relating to the protection of the Sabbath, and imposing a penalty on persons working their

sugar mills on that day, unhesitatingly and candidly replied, "Let the bill pass, and I shall be glad to know who shall prevent my doing as I please on my own estate on that day." So much for colonial legislation. The bill passes into a law, but its provisions are seldom enforced—and why?—The administration of the law is confided to men as likely as any others to depart from its requirements—to men, whose *private interests* are so interwoven, the one with the other, as to throw a stumbling block of no ordinary magnitude in the way of the most conscientious amongst them, leading them to depart from their *public duty*. Let the colonists be spoken of with the highest respect; concede to them whatsoever is excellent and whatsoever is honourable in man: but such is the fact, that consistently with their *private interests*, the colonists *cannot*, and the colonists *dare not* administer the provisions of even the existing slave-code, *as fully* and *as honourably* as is consistent with impartial justice. The assertion is not made unadvisedly. The magistracy of Jamaica, in the absence from the island of more than nineteen twentieths of the proprietors, is confided to whom?—to attorneys, the agents of absentees; to overseers, those on whom devolve more immediately the care and management of an estate; to jobbers, a class of men who do not themselves cultivate any of the staple commodities of the island, but hire their slaves to the planter usually for the purpose of digging cane-holes, or accomplishing the severer labour of the estate; to medical men, to one of whom may pertain the practice of many estates, and the care of several hundred slaves; and to merchants, &c. Now how is it possible, making every allowance for human nature, that these men, whose interests are so inseparably connected and interwoven with one another, can be supposed to administer impartial justice to the slave? Justice has ever been represented to the world as blindfold, and holding the scales of mercy with an unerring hand; and it has ever been the boast of

Britain, that her judgment seat has been preserved uncorrupted, and that the constitution of the land has thrown such a barrier around it, as to preserve it unimpeachable and above suspicion. But what a contrast do the colonies present to this? There, a slave is cruelly treated by his master. The master, let it be supposed, is an attorney or an overseer. The slave applies to the nearest magistrate. The magistrate is a jobber, a doctor, or a merchant. The first is employed by complainant's master, to labour his cane field; the second, to visit his sick; and the third, to supply lumber or other necessities for the estate. Is it probable that any one of these men will be possessed of so much moral courage, as to induce them, in the very teeth of their own interests, and amidst the persecution of their neighbours, to prosecute the offender; or would they not be much more likely to shift from their own shoulders, the hearing of a complaint, or the meddling with an affair, which could promise them nothing but the loss of friends or money, together with the stigma of the whole fraternity of planters. No one will presume to say, that there may not be exceptions to such a rule as this, and especially where men's interests are not involved to such a degree as to leave them more at liberty to act from principle; but so long as such avenues are open to abuse, it never can, let men dissemble as they may, with any degree of honesty, be stated, either that justice now *is* impartially administered to the slave, or that *it can be* so administered to him, under existing circumstances. And yet, in justice to the colonists, let it be told, that there are men amongst them who, place them in other circumstances, and separate them from the concomitant evils of slavery, would yet be found to discharge the same duties in a very different manner. But, to fight against the received opinions of the country, to act conscientiously, by setting self-interest at defiance in the face of obloquy and persecution, these are barriers to the just administration of the laws, which lead men at present to sacri-

fice their principles on the altar of public opinion. Are these evils or not, my lord?—or shall their existence be disputed? If they are found to be evils, the remedy is simple; and if a question should arise as to their existence, it is simple also. For the latter, call to the bar of your honourable house evidence to attest the facts on oath. Let the truth be established, not by any anonymous correspondent, but out of the mouths of many witnesses; and when established, then let a radical cure be administered for the former—such as may, as far as human foresight and precaution can effect, prevent the recurrence of evils, which meet the philanthropist at the very threshold of colonial improvement, and entail an innumerable train of evils upon the planter, as well as upon the slave. And the remedy would be this—the appointment of a stipendiary magistracy—the office to be sustained by men totally unconnected with slavery, and whose honour and independence of character would qualify them for the administration of impartial justice. No doubt the commissioners of legal inquiry have stated these facts, amidst the mass of evidence they would have an opportunity of collecting, as to the administration of justice in the colonies: but should their investigations have been confined to the higher tribunals and courts of law, it is yet a subject not unworthy the consideration of your Grace to enter upon, and which, if ever any substantial benefit can be conferred upon the slave, must be entered upon and investigated with the utmost fidelity.

There are other cases, illustrative of the subject, which might be adduced; the names of individuals bearing the commission of the peace might be submitted; the professions of the magistracy of whole parishes might be analyzed, and proof given of the correctness of the statements that have been already advanced: but as the ends of justice, and not personal invective, is the object of these letters, and as brevity will best comport with the high calling of your

Grace, I shall content myself by the observations already made, and the arguments already advanced on this part of my subject.

Should it, however, be asked, my Lord, how far a regulation of this kind would affect the interests of individuals, or disturb the peace of the colonies, the question is easily answered. As to the interests of individuals suffering from such an arrangement, the advantages would be on the planter's side. As a magistrate, he would be released from an office without emolument; and in which, if he discharged his duty faithfully to the slave, it will not fail to draw down upon his head the vituperations of a host of enemies. Therefore, if he be a conscientious man, he would hail with delight the establishment of a commission, releasing him from much perplexity and discord, and securing to the slave more ample benefits, than any which he could bestow. And, on the other hand, if he be an unfaithful magistrate, he is no longer worthy to be entrusted with an office, involving in the just discharge of its duties, the moral well-being and happiness of a whole neighbourhood. Neither would a measure of this sort prove likely to disturb the peace of society. Doubtless there are many who would be ready enough to raise an outcry against it, as they would against innovation however excellent, in a system so fraught with error;—but would it be reasonable to suppose, my Lord, that a regulation, affecting in a high degree, the interest of the slave, providing him with a sure protection against abuse of power, securing to him the full possession of his privileges, placing within his reach a tribunal to which he might fearlessly and confidently appeal when wronged; is it reasonable to suppose, that he, for whose peculiar advantage these, and numberless other benefits, were designed by such regulations, would be the first to paralyze the effects of your Lordship's government, in providing a refuge for him against unjust oppression? No—fallen as the negro is in the scale of

civilized humanity, he has yet *discernment enough* to know who are his friends, and *gratitude* withal, to submit himself cheerfully and thankfully to their guidance. The effect would be far otherwise. There is not a proprietor of slaves throughout the colonies, really desirous of promoting their happiness, who would not hail the event as of incalculable benefit; and if there should be any otherwise minded, they would be found amongst men of petty interests, or of low design; or amongst that still more numerous class, who tremble at the thought of having wrested from their hands a power, with which they were ever unworthy to be trusted, and which would afford the slave a right of appeal to a disinterested tribunal. I shall not trespass longer at present on your time, than by most earnestly supplicating your Grace to rescue the administration of the colonial slave laws from the hands of men, who, however great their integrity may be, have yet so many powerful and strong temptations to pervert justice, or to withhold from the slave the full measure of relief of such ameliorating laws as the legislature have or may hereafter enact for his benefit and protection.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.

NEGRO EVIDENCE.

MY LORD,

The next point to which I would solicit the attention of your Grace, is the question of negro evidence. One would think that at this enlightened period of the world, such a proposition would admit of no argument : and truly the objections hitherto urged against the adoption of it, have been of the weakest description, and founded either upon an erroneous view of the subject, or upon an expediency, which has no real existence, unless it be in the imaginations of those who would perpetuate a system of unmitigated slavery. It may, therefore, be advisable, briefly to advert to the arguments that have been adduced, both for and against the measure ; that from the general bearings of the question, on the interests of both the planter and the slave, it may be satisfactorily disposed of.

There are two points which seem imperiously to demand the admission of negro evidence, viz.—The protection of the slave *in his property*, and *in his person*. It is no solid argument against the measure to say, that because slaves are seldom dispossessed of their property by arbitrary or cruel masters, that therefore there should not be a law to protect him in the enjoyment of it. Every body knows, that as matters now stand in the slave colonies, (with the exception of those two or three inferior islands where the right of giving evidence has been conceded to the negro,) any free man may with impunity, openly or covertly, rob the slave of his lawful goods, or rather of the goods which by law should belong to him, without any redress. It matters little that public opinion would denounce the man (as certainly it would) who

would be base enough to take advantage of this acknowledged defect in the law, whilst the fact stands recorded on the face of the every-day proceedings of West India courts, that the negro's evidence, were it tendered in attestation of any flagrant wrong committed against his property, would go for nothing, whilst the oath of the very meanest freeman, not disqualified by actual crime, one of the most abject of his species, and differing from the negro in complexion only, would go to punish the invader of his rights, (though he were the most powerful of the land,) who had wantonly abused his power; and yet must the slave, however respectable in character, or however decent in demeanour, (and not a few amongst them are so,) submit unredressed to the loss of his little all.

But this evil, great as it may appear, and pregnant with injury to the slave, is yet far outweighed in the comparison, when it is contrasted with the injury the slave may sustain from the infliction of his *personal wrongs*.

He may be flogged, how and when, and to what extent his master pleases; nor would his own evidence avail, though it were ever so faithfully corroborated by his fellow servants, and they too of the most unblemished reputation, to convict, much less to punish, either the merciless hand that dealt the blow, or him by whose commands the limits of the law have been violated. Nor is this all. In the absence of his testimony, the slave is yet subject to another, and to a more grievous debasement. His wife may be wrested from his embraces by some savage sensualist to become the mistress of another; his child, yet preserved by a father or a mother's care, from the contamination of vice, may, for the same base design, be torn with violence from his roof; and the only friend, in the absence of all human consolation, to whom he can appeal for succour, is that Omniscient Being who, though clothed with the majesty of omnipotence, has yet an ear of pity open to the Negro's cry, and

will hear and answer him. Can that system be right, my Lord, which opens an avenue to the perpetration of such appalling crimes, and such boundless abuses? Assuredly it cannot. But you will be told that cases of this kind are extreme, and rarely happen, and that in all matters affecting his real welfare, or the exercise of any abuse of power towards him, the slave has an appeal to the Council of Protection, and that by this lawfully constituted assembly his grievances will be faithfully adjudicated. But how can this be? The Council of Protection resists the evidence of the slave. Let them be men of the most undoubted honour, or possessed of the most melting benevolence, they cannot go beyond the prescribed boundaries of the law. They may hear his complaint, to pity the remediless predicament of the unhappy sufferer—but the law has made him a slave, and the law rejects his testimony. But again, say some, this also is to suppose an extreme case, and one which is by no means of common occurrence. Will not the Negro *sometimes* be able to adduce other proof than his own? Some free person in the more humble walk of life, who may have been an eye witness to his sufferings, and in whose case there does not exist any moral disability to affect his testimony. In reply to this, it need only be observed, that whenever a man purposes being guilty of an abuse of power, he will carefully watch both his time and his opportunity for doing so.—He will take good heed to guard against any stretch of authority in the presence of those by whose evidence he can be made responsible for all his actions to the laws of the land. To mention, however, a case in point. Pending the examination of witnesses, in a committee of the Jamaica house of Assembly a few years ago, on the subject of Negro evidence, a question was put on oath by the chairman, Mr. Reynolds, (one of the most indefatigable supporters of the Negro's claims,) to a reverend gentleman then under examination, to this effect—‘Have you ever known

an instance in which the ends of public justice have been defeated through the inadmissibility of Negro evidence ?' The answer was—' I have.' The individual was then called upon to state the particulars of it ; which he did, nearly as follows—' In the parish where I reside, the following case was lately brought before the Council of Protection, and came under my own immediate observation. A white man, the owner of a small plantation, sought to seduce from the path of virtue a young woman of colour, *the natural child of his own father*, but *a slave*. The girl, taught by her mother (who had been instructed by the missionaries in the fundamental truths of religion) the sinfulness of an act which would be rendered doubly heinous by the relative situation of the parties, refused to listen to his solicitations. The monster (for the name of a man can hardly be assigned to him) placed the girl in the stocks, and renewed his entreaties. This, however, produced no other effect on the mind of the unhappy female, than to induce her more strenuously than ever, to resist his importunities. At last, as a dernier resort, flogging was had recourse to, and the poor prisoner was most unmercifully punished. But every artifice that villany could contrive, or lust invent, was in vain. Virtue triumphed over vice, and the poor girl was finally released from her confinement. On regaining her liberty, the first use she made of it was to apply to a magistrate ; who, shocked at the cruelty of the treatment she had received, and to his own credit, summoned a Council of Protection forthwith to hear her story. It was simple, and well authenticated ; but, it *was the story of a slave*. Gladly would the Council of Protection have punished the monster ; for the members of it were fully persuaded of the truth of the girl's statements ; but the law forbade them : and thus, not only was justice impeded, but guilt of the most appalling and aggravated character suffered to escape.' What terms, my Lord, are sufficiently strong to mark the detestation of every rational

man to a case like this, to which it were impossible to find a parallel, but in the annals of slavery. And yet this part of the evidence, taken before the Committee of the Jamaica Assembly, does not appear on the face of their printed minutes; and on enquiring why it was not reported, I am informed that a discussion arose in the committee, as to the propriety of expunging this part of the evidence; and that it was expunged from the minutes accordingly—a member at the same time observing, ‘Are we not cutting a rod to break our own heads.’ Thus, through the inadmissibility of slave evidence, may the most abandoned and profligate acts be perpetrated with impunity, against the person of the slave, by any free man; and though it were even carried to the very utmost limits of human barbarity, and though death itself were to be the issue of the event, still the culprit is accountable to no earthly tribunal, though the act were verified by the oath of one hundred slaves.

But a farther proof may be adduced, of the necessity for the immediate admission of the testimony of slaves; it is to be found in the report of a late trial in the island of Jamaica, of sundry slaves for the murder of their master. The case is reported at length in the *Jamaica Public Advertiser*, of September last. The editor, when noticing the subject, pertinently remarks, “This day’s paper contains a report of a trial for murder. Rarely has a case of such extreme atrocity come before the public of Jamaica. The deceased was a free person of colour. He was a married man. The cold-blooded, revolting murder was perpetrated in the presence of a crowd of slaves; and as is charged by the *moral* evidence of the slaves, *who were executed*, some free people were accomplices; and horrid to relate, one (*his own wife*) was a witness of the deed, and incited to the crime:—but, we will go no farther.” It appears from the report of this trial, that the master of these slaves was a man overwhelmed with debt; and that the sheriff’s officer or marshal had in

his possession sundry writs for the seizure of his chattels. His wife and family, from what reason it does not appear, formed a design against his life ; and in order to effect their horrid purpose, they set to work upon the minds of the slaves, saying that if their master should survive beyond a certain day, they would be seized by the sheriff's officer, and themselves and their families sold, and perhaps separated for ever. The plot succeeded ; and the unfortunate slaves, maddened by the anticipation of a final bereavement of all that earth held dear to them, perpetrated the cruel deed. Justice, however, speedily overtook them : they were tried, condemned, and executed. At the place of suffering, the unhappy men, when placed on the scaffold, declared that during the time of the murder, *the mistress and her sons were present*, walking up and down in the piazza ; and that when their master awoke from his sleep, crying, help ! help ! the same persons were engaged in encouraging the Negroes, (having previously given them rum to drink,) telling them to seize their master ; and that they seized and murdered him accordingly. But, my Lord, the concluding testimony of these dying men remains yet to be noticed ; and truly it is most appalling. Just as they were about being launched into the eternal world, they spoke as follows to the surrounding multitude—" Tell massa, thanky—tell him thanky. ' Tell misses, and old misses, thanky—for do them bring us to this. Do them bring us here. Them cheat we. Them say we must kill massa, else them would punish us, and marshall would take and sell every one of we. Bat we pray every body to pray God to forgive them."

Here is a case of the most unheard-of cruelty covered by the absence of Negro evidence ; for admitting the criminality of the slaves to the fullest possible extent, yet surely the instigators of so foul a conspiracy ought first to have paid the forfeit of their own lives to the offended laws of the country. But the freeman escapes the vengeance of the law, and the

poor, deceived, and semi-barbarous slave, meets with an end, the moral guilt of which, if there be a God in heaven, will grind the freeman to powder.

It does indeed appear most paradoxical, my Lord, that this creature man, when in a state of slavery, though his evidence will not be received in a matter involving in it the interest of a freeman for a single farthing, will yet be permitted to testify against his fellow-slave, and upon that evidence, which in the one case is rejected altogether, though the matter at issue concerned the veriest trifle, will his fellow-slave be doomed to suffer the utmost limits of the law. It has been the invariable custom to put slaves to death (as was the case in the instance before us) on the evidence of slaves. Surely this is to form but a low estimate of the value of the life of a fellow-creature, that he who would not be believed on oath in a matter affecting the life of his master's dog, will yet be believed in a matter which involves in it consequences the most awful—perhaps the destinies of a brother throughout eternity. If the slave be unfit to testify in the one case, is he not still more disqualified from doing so in the other? or, if he be acknowledged as of sufficient maturity in understanding and moral worth to give evidence in the latter, should he not, upon every principle of reason, and expediency, and humanity, be at once, and for ever, privileged to bear witness in the former.

These, briefly, are amongst some of the arguments that may be adduced in favour of the admissibility of slave evidence; but they are at present only glanced at. With respect, however, to the mode of reasoning resorted to against the measure, little can be said that is at all plausible. Some persons, fearful of making any further concession to the slave, and dreading the loss or the curtailment of arbitrary power, have attempted to show, that by the admission of slave evidence against free men, conspiracies would be often resorted to, and fomented amongst slaves, to the preju-

dice of their masters, and to suit the Negro's purpose; that numberless evils would result to white persons from the proneness of the Negro to falsify his statements; and that the cause of substantial justice would be seriously impeded by the difficulty of discriminating, amidst so much equivocation, between truth and error. But in reply to all this, there is an unanswerable argument to be found against every such objection, by adverting to the description of persons composing colonial juries. These are planters—men who know the Negro character well, and, moreover, who are bound to receive the testimony set forth only so far as they deem the parties worthy of credit, and no farther; men who, in addition to all their local experience, have the privilege of exercising their own judgments as to the integrity or infamy of a witness, and who may just receive his testimony or not, in like manner as a British juror would do, acting and judging from the supposed veracity of the deponent. This consideration would of itself even afford a sufficient guarantee against every abuse to which the admission of slaves to give evidence might be liable, and it would prove a wholesome safeguard in all cases against the perversion of so salutary a privilege, where the integrity of the witness might not be above suspicion.

It does not indeed appear, my Lord, upon taking a calm and dispassionate view of the subject, that the admission of the evidence of slaves, when received *quantum valeat*, as all other evidence is received, would be prejudicial either to the interests of individuals, or to the public safety. Far otherwise. Whatever would afford the slave a greater degree of security in his person, in his family, and in his property, must have a very beneficial tendency:—as it concerns the slave, it must necessarily conduce to his domestic comfort and happiness, and consequently to an increase of order, of industry, and of contentment amongst them. So that in the end the master would be mainly benefited by the

acquisition of labourers raised in the scale of being to the rank of civilized men ; and he would at least possess the satisfaction of knowing, that, to whomsoever he might confide the care or the management of his estates, his people would henceforth enjoy the freest access to the tribunals of the land, whenever they might consider themselves aggrieved, with an appeal to the law even upon their own testimony. Nor must it be forgotten, that the Negro, having now a new incentive to watch over his reputation, would become more circumspect in his conduct, lest, by a contrary behaviour, he might lose his privilege of being esteemed an upright man. A more powerful stimulus to a sober, orderly, and Christian life, could not well be devised, than conceding the legitimate privilege to the slave, and making his individual participation in it a necessary consequence upon the steadiness with which he should maintain a reputation for being so.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.

COMPULSORY MANUMISSION.

MY LORD,

Of the various arguments which have been resorted to by the colonists in support of their claims, none have been more loudly or frequently put forth than the cruelty and injustice of wresting from their hands a property, which the laws of Great Britain, as they conceive, have secured to them for ever. And it must be acknowledged, that it does appear most inconsistent, and unworthy of a great and powerful nation to trample upon rights so conveyed and guaranteed, and by a process of cheap humanity, to raise a cry against slavery, without ever offering to contribute from her own resources to undo the heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free. It is nothing to the point, as the argument stands between England and her colonies, to say, that the Negro had a previous right in himself, which no statute of man's device could rob him of. This is true—strictly true. Great Britain, by her countenance of slavery, and by her legal enactments in favour of slavery, violated every precept of the divine law. The compact between Britain and her slave colonies was as unnatural as it was unholy, invading the rights and liberties of free-born men, and therefore ought never to have been entered into. There was a law long anterior to hers, promulgated seventeen hundred years before, under the solemn sanction of heaven, in these words—"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." But against this law she sinned: she tore the African from his country; she sold him for a slave; and then, in his captivity, she left him to the arbitrary domi-

nion of his enemies, hardly condescending in her senate-house, till roused to the duty by a philanthropy which will cause the name of Wilberforce to be blessed by unborn generations, to ask, from year to year, how fared it with him. My Lord, you have only to say that you would not be a slave, to prove that this injustice is Britain's ; that the sufferings of the Negro, however appalling and diversified, lie at her door ; and that the two-fold obligation, of redressing the wrongs of the Negro, and of liquidating, as far as that be possible, the claims of the planter, belong to her likewise.

In my present letter I do not propose to pursue this subject farther, than to show, that if the planter thus look for justice, the negro has unquestionably a yet higher claim to justice likewise. Were the British legislature in the height of her benevolence to say to the West India planter, "Here is an equivalent for your property ; we are satisfied with the injustice, as well as the inhumanity of those barbarous laws ; which gave you a property in your fellow-creature—here is an indemnity for you !" who is there, after this, that would presume to contend for the planter's right any longer over his slave ? He kept the Negro as a hostage, till the party pledging should come forward to redeem him ; but this effected, his right to control the Negro ceases for ever. Now, my Lord, if this principle be admitted as just and reasonable by the planter, (and who amongst them would not do so ?) surely then, each individual Negro, who can satisfy the demands of his master, by laying down a price for his purchase, such as any disinterested party may pronounce fair and reasonable, ought, by parity of reasoning, to possess the same inalienable right to freedom ? If justice be what the planter contends for, and the slave, or any one for him, will lay down the price at which he is valued, surely there ought no longer to arise a question as to the claim of the Negro, upon every principle of fair dealing, and even upon the

planter's own showing, to be set free for ever. Yet, even against this measure, though bearing the impress of his own beloved *justice* upon it, the planter contends. He alleges, that by passing an act for the compulsory manumission of slaves, you deprive him of his most valuable labourers ; of his tradesmen, his drivers, and of those in whom alone he can place implicit confidence :—that by leaving the inferior slaves upon his hands, the work of the plantation is impeded, his capital rendered less valuable, and that in fine, inevitable ruin awaits him. He will also allege, that in order to procure the means of purchasing their freedom, a powerful temptation will be thrown in the way of the slave, inclining him to rob his master ; that thefts will be multiplied, and that dishonesty, disorder, and crime will be the necessary consequences resulting from such a privilege. But there cannot be a pretext invented more illusory than this. The truth is, that there are but few slaves on any estate, and in some there is not an individual, who would be able to pay down their estimated value ; and even upon the supposition that funds could be raised, for the purpose of purchasing the majority of those who may be ranked amongst the more deserving, would not this produce an effect quite contrary to the anticipated result of the planter, by proving a most powerful stimulus to all to become deserving likewise ? Would not its tendency be, to raise the tone of moral feeling amongst the slaves, and to animate them to that honest and persevering industry, by means of which they might look forward to the blessing of one day or other enjoying the sweets of hallowed liberty ? Surely it would. Nor will the objection urged as to the tendency of compulsory manumission to promote dishonesty, stand for a single moment the test of inquiry. For who are they that will aspire to liberty ? Whose hearts are they that will burn within them, animated by the laudable desire of becoming freemen ? Certainly not the already vile or worthless ; nor that too numerous class of unhappy

Africans, who are so sunk in ignorance and in superstition, as hardly to be able to discern between their right hand and their left : but it will be those whom Christian instruction hath raised above the level of their fellows, and to whom religion and civilization have given a foretaste of the sweets of liberty, and taught them how to use it. These would be the men, foremost to labour, heart and hand, for the enjoyment of this privilege, and in whom the British islands would hereafter recognize the securest pledge for their safeguard and protection.

Nor does there, my Lord, appear to be any thing in this act of compulsory manumission, that would in the least degree effect the interest of the planter ; but on the contrary, its natural tendency would be to stimulate his labourers to honest industry, in the hope of freedom. The planter receives for his slave a just remuneration ; and what more can he require ? His houses and his lands are not infringed upon ; and the slave, once so costly, becomes no longer burdensome. The very hut which sheltered him in the days of his captivity, reverts to its original owner ; and the garden and the grounds which once supplied him with his daily food, are henceforth subject to the same master. For the honour of the proprietors, I would hope that many amongst them would rejoice to witness the efforts of their faithful domestics crowned with success ; and even contribute themselves to the accomplishment of their wishes. But, since there is unquestionably a much more numerous class of persons who are altogether at variance with any such concessions, it becomes necessary, without delay, to establish by law, the Negro's right to freedom, on his paying to his master a fair award. In order to effect this on the most friendly and least dissatisfactory terms, and to obviate any objections that might be offered by the planter as to the inconvenience likely to result to him from being called upon to liberate a confidential servant at an unseasonable time ; it might be so arranged,

that any Negro wishing to become the purchaser of his freedom, should be required to notify his intention at least three or six months previously, as the case might be ; when two individuals should be chosen as valuers, by the master and the slave, one by each of them, who should testify on oath as to their proper value, and in the event of a disagreement arising between the parties, that then a third person should be selected by both, whose decision upon oath should be considered as conclusive. By this, or some such arrangement, advantage could not be taken by either party. The master would have ample time afforded him for making arrangements for the future absence of his slave ; whilst at the same time leisure would be afforded the slave for breaking off his connexion with the estate, if that should be rendered necessary, and of preparing for his future operations. It would follow of course, that a deed of manumission should be handed to the Negro immediately on the payment of his purchase money ; and in order to meet those cases wherein entails, mortgages, or suits in Chancery might stand in the way of such negotiations, it would be necessary that the Legislature should empower mortgagees in possession, receivers under the Court of Chancery, and others to act in all cases of this kind, as if they were the sole possessors, and to make good in all points the title of the slave to freedom ; nor would it be a mighty boon granted to the slave, that the law officers of the crown should be instructed to prepare the necessary papers, without expense to him.

The effect likely to be produced by a measure of this kind, would be of a most healing tendency. On the one hand, it would afford to every philanthropist and Negro's friend an ample opportunity for exhibiting their zeal in the cause of suffering humanity ; and that by the most indubitable proofs that could be given of their sincerity—contributing the means for procuring their freedom ; whilst, on the other hand, the master receiving from his slave a fair indem-

nity, would, in due time, (if he did not at once acknowledge the justice of the principle,) recognise it as the best possible regulation which could be devised under existing circumstances ; and ultimately, he would perceive it leading to what is so much to be desired—the introduction of free labourers throughout our whole colonial possessions. Indeed, there does not appear to be any one objection, which can be founded upon either reason, justice, or the expediency of the case, against the enactment of a law enforcing the manumission of slaves under such circumstances ; whilst it involves in it so many likely advantages to all parties, as to render the immediate adoption of the plan not only practicable, but highly necessary and expedient.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.

PUNISHMENTS.

MY LORD,

Of all the abuses which have ever existed in any country, and particularly in the management of slaves, there never has been one calling more loudly for redress than this of punishment. It has been attempted to palliate or to defend the prevalence of this practice, by the existence of corporal punishment in the British army, and arguments have been adduced in support of the continuance of such a system by the analogy subsisting between them. But the cases of the soldier and of the slave are widely different. The one voluntarily enters the service of his country, and receives a supposed equivalent as the condition upon which he sacrifices his liberty to the will of others. The other is torn from his home, compelled to labour against his will without hire, and to submit to laws to which he is bound by the heaviest penalties to give an unconditional assent. There is also this difference to be observed in the circumstances of the parties:—whatever be the punishment of the soldier, that punishment cannot be inflicted upon him at the arbitrary dictum of an individual; he is fairly and impartially tried, and that by men without passion or prejudice, and whose honour as soldiers, and whose humanity as men, are both concerned in their verdict. But not so the slave. The law gives his master—or any man, however base, to whom his master may delegate that power—an authority the most arbitrary, and almost absolute, over him. He may, as often as his anger, or caprice, or revenge dictates, and without any previous trial, or even (if such a man could be found) without assigning any reason, inflict upon his person, with a common

cart-whip, thirty-nine lashes—not unfrequently to be “brushed out with ebonies,” or, in other words, to be lacerated by thorns whilst his wounds, yet bleeding from the infliction of the former punishment, are open to receive them. It is no libel upon the planters to state these facts; for however humane and merciful as individuals they may be, here is a power which no man living should possess over his fellow-creature, but which at this very hour is entrusted to the West India planter. And especially when it is considered, that both the quantum and the mode of punishment devolves upon overseers, a class of men possessing no interest in the slaves, beyond a mere stipendiary allowance, receivable at the caprice of his employer. In the heat of passion, or on the impulse of the moment, he may, without taking time to weigh the circumstances or the merits of the case, command the slave to be laid down with his face to the earth, and in the most summary and cruel manner flog him, as he would not do, though restive, his own pampered steed. Surely, my Lord, it cannot be reconcileable with the due administration of justice; surely it cannot tend to maintain the peace or the stability of the colonies; neither can it operate as a moral stimulus to the slave to demean himself submissively in his present condition, that such monstrous power should be confided to men who, if they abuse it not, yet have, unquestionably, many strong temptations to do so. Let the Negro be taught to respect the laws; let him, whilst slavery has a being, and even when it shall have ceased to exist, be made amenable to what is right and proper; but having taught him first what his rights are, then secure to him, against violence and against outrage, the full and the impartial enjoyment of those rights, and thus raise him above the level of the brute, which by British enactment is secured by laws and penalties from the wanton barbarity of its oppressors. How paradoxical, that in one happy portion of the King of England’s dominions a man may not cruelly

abuse his ass, and yet in another portion of the very same possession, (oh, lamentable fact!) man may, with impunity, and as spleen or passion governs him, so despotically lord it over his fellow-man, that his life has not unfrequently been the sacrifice to this demon of vengeance. Justice, reason, and humanity, all cry aloud for the redress of this abuse. And how simple is the remedy! Place the power of inflicting corporal punishment in the hands of the stipendiary magistrate, and henceforth let no man dare, at his peril, without the intervention of lawful authority, to lay a finger upon the slave. Let solitary confinement—and this, too, under modified restrictions—be substituted by the planter; and when they may think themselves aggrieved, then let them find redress in the magistrate, but in him only. An arrangement of this kind, my Lord, would, no doubt, excite the most vehement opposition from overseers, as well as amongst some of the more violent and arbitrary of the proprietors themselves: but if you would consult the feelings of a very numerous and influential portion of slave-owners—if you would hear the approving voice of the whole British nation—if you would consult the interests of eight hundred thousand fellow-creatures, and, in a higher degree, the happiness of almost the entire population of the whole West Indian Archipelago—you would for ever put an end to this most barbarous practice of a civilized age, and tell every West Indian proprietor, candidly and fairly, that as his chief interest must, or ought, to consist in the well-being of his slave, so it is absolutely necessary, in order to effect this, that his free servants should themselves be placed under such wholesome restrictions as may secure the slaves from the possibility of being harshly or cruelly dealt with.

It has been said, and, I believe, justly too, that few soldiers after the disgrace of once receiving corporal punishment, have ever after been able to hold up their heads amongst their companions in arms; that they have after such

an exposure, become either heart-broken, or indifferent to their future condition. And so it is with the slave. Punishment brutalizes, and sinks the already barbarous still lower in the scale of wretchedness. It fails to operate as an incentive to industry, and consequently it fails in producing the effects which are expected from it. Should it, however, prove a means of doing so, the effects are transient, and leading more frequently to the repetition of the same system of punishment, than to any happier result. It hardens the heart—deadens all the finer feelings of the creature—and, if it excite not the slave to any acts of open or secret revenge, its natural tendency is such as to extinguish that confidence, and kindly intercourse, and feeling, which, under other circumstances will be found to exist, and to promote in the Negro's breast a hatred of his oppressor, and a watchfulness that he may in every pursuit gain the advantage over him. Hence it happens, that amongst the more refractory Negroes, punishment from the lash is ever preferred to solitary confinement, for, having no character to lose, they prefer that species of punishment the endurance of which is soonest at an end.

But, my Lord, if these observations should have any weight, when the subject of punishment is treated of in a general way; how much more loudly will it not be found to demand the interference of the legislature, when the case of females is particularly adverted to. It were sad enough to think that such a system of punishment could be tolerated in the case of men, but doubly so when it is considered that women likewise are subject to it, under circumstances of the most shameful indecency. The young and the aged, mothers of families, and even those whose hoary locks proclaim length of years, are openly, and in the presence of the other sex, doomed to the endurance of this disgraceful abuse. Yes; were it not that I had rather see the evil corrected by the strong hand of power, on the ground of its barbarous

and unchristian tendency, than from the exposure of some of its many enormities, I could point out to your Grace some of the most astounding facts bearing upon this point, and that would harrow up the soul of any individual not yet past feeling. But I shall be content at present, without entering into a minute detail, with merely hinting at the fact, that the unhappy female, even at that season when nature puts in her claim to more than common sympathy, is often doomed to suffer from the unrelenting lash; and, in some cases, with an aggravation of wrong, such as were I to repeat, neither your Grace nor any reader of these letters would credit. But, my lord, it remains for you to raise the poor, sable slave from the depth of her degradation; for I am persuaded you will allow, that every stroke inflicted upon her, sinks her lower in the scale of being. She may be a mother! and what will her children say, as she returns to them bleeding in sorrow? And her husband, too!—if the black man have a heart, oh! how will it beat, and rise, and swell with indignation, against the cowardly dishonour done to the partner of his bed. The wonder is, that nature's feelings can be bound and enslaved as the body is, when every spring in man's affections is impelled to burst the barrier and to avenge the wrong. What a conflict must there be between revenge and fear, as the husband, in silent sorrow, (for he dare not give utterance to what is passing within) contemplates the scene; and what a lesson do the children learn, but to desecrate the wretch that made a mother weep. I know not a more bitter drop in the whole cup of slavery than this.

But it is vauntingly said by some, that when they punish the female slave the whip is not used, and that rods only, or ebonies, are substituted for it. And what of this? Is there not the same scandalous exposure of the person of the female; and is there not only this difference between them, that if the wounds are not so deep, they are yet more abundant? But it is not the fact, that even rods are generally

adopted in the punishment of females. There may be, and there are a few isolated cases, where some persons, from humanity, but many more from a view to their own interests, and that they may be thought humane, have adopted this plan. But in general the female slave knows no difference from the opposite sex, either as to the manner, or the quantum of punishment they receive. I have heard of some, however, who, by way of encouraging marriages amongst their slaves, have added this privilege, amongst others, to such persons, that a female, when once married, should afterwards be exempt from punishment. On one estate where the practice is said to prevail, the following illustration of the pertinacity with which the right was defended took place: "A married woman, a slave, having been remiss in some department of her labour, the driver, also a Negro, was proceeding as usual to administer summary correction, when the female resisted. The driver called others to his assistance, no doubt intending to give her a double portion, when the woman, boiling with anger, could do little more than point to one of her fingers. There was her marriage-ring; and, resting her finger upon it, she dared the driver to proceed. 'Hei! me da married woman—first take off dis, and dem from me.' The driver was compelled to abandon his whip, and seek for some other mode of redress."

Little, my Lord, has been said in this letter as to the quantum of punishment; as that subject has been so often dwelt upon. It is enough for my present purpose briefly to direct your attention to the number of stripes—to the person inflicting them—and to the instrument by which they are inflicted. The law prescribes thirty-nine stripes as the maximum of punishment. This, when contrasted with military usage, will by some be considered not excessive: but mark the instrument—a whip, the lash of which is from nine to twelve feet in length, wielded by a powerful arm, well skilled in the management of it; so much so, that by the sound of

the whip the Negro is commonly roused to pursue his daily toil, the woods resounding with the echo. This instrument, also, is not unfrequently in the hand of a person in whose breast revenge or jealousy may exist, which serve to nerve the arm that holds it. It has been attempted to be shown by some, that the drivers are in general men who are advanced in years—rather to be distinguished by their venerable locks, than by their austere countenances ; but this is not the fact. The driver is commonly an able bodied Negro ; and, from his office and habits, too frequently possessing less of the milk of human kindness than other men : dressed in a little brief authority, he feels the full weight of an office, which enjoins upon him the execution of all his master's commands, whether those commands may be agreeable to his own natural feelings or not. The orders which he receives are conclusive and peremptory : whatever stands in the way of their accomplishment, it is for him to remove by the strong arm of power, or be himself removed from his office, followed by disgrace and punishment. There will be cases, no doubt, where the character of the driver will be otherwise than is here represented. Instances have been known of their expressing an abhorrence of punishment, and anxiously inquiring how they could, with a sense of duty to their masters, be spared the painful predicament of enforcing it : but such, it is presumed, are of rare occurrence ; and it commonly happens, but especially amongst those whose minds have not yet been civilized by the peaceful effects of Christianity, that the driver will be found ready for all work, and more commonly converting his office into an engine for the exercise of the most arbitrary power, and using it for the purpose of gratifying the worst passions of his nature, rather than that he may administer in the smallest degree towards befriending his brother in adversity : he lords it over his fellow-men with a savageness of temper, so common amongst the unconverted herds of Guinea, and rules with a rod of

iron the weak and the helpless, whose wretchedness of body and of estate can furnish no pander to the gratification of his appetites. But slavery were a lot hard enough to bear, without superadding to its misery the absolute rule of so many masters.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.

MARRIAGE.

MY LORD,

Twenty years ago, there was hardly an instance on record of a marriage having been celebrated between a solitary couple of Negro slaves in the island of Jamaica. A most lamentable indifference as to their state and character as rational and immortal beings existed in the minds of their superiors; nor had the wretched creatures themselves the advantage of being instructed as to the unlawfulness of that promiscuous intercourse between the sexes, which then almost universally, and even now, to a very considerable degree, still prevails. It was reserved for the missionaries, however, to inculcate upon their dark understandings a more salutary lesson. These men, who had gone out with their lives in their hands, simple minded and faithful, were the foremost in this good work. The state of the Church of England was, at that time, in our colonial possessions at a very low ebb. The most heartless apathy prevailed amongst her clergy, and it seemed as if the Negro race were to be altogether excommunicated from the privileges of their public as well as of their private ministrations. The white man's monopoly extended not only to a monopoly of all that could gratify the senses—revelling as he then did, in the enjoyment of the most unbounded luxury; but it was alleged, that to him likewise pertained the exclusive privilege of Divine worship, since there was not actually at the period in question, a single spot in the parish churches, allotted to the accommodation of the slave. If he came there, (as few of them ever did) it was either that he might stand or lie down in the aisle unheeded, to return to his home filled with as

much superstition as when he entered it. Catechetical instruction was wholly unknown, (for the Negro by many was looked upon as an animal inferior to man, and hardly possessed of an immortal soul ;) nor did the clergy in any way direct their discourse to them, nor recognise this portion of their fellow-creatures as members of their congregations. It is not to be wondered at, if, under such circumstances, immorality should have prevailed to a fearful extent—that polygamy, with every other impure right, borrowed from their forefathers, and introduced from Africa, should have been almost universally practised amongst them. The Negroes were, in fact, left to themselves as it concerned their religious instruction. The planter got his sugar and his rum, and took no farther thought concerning them, provided they were strong and healthy, and equal to their daily toil. So that what, from the natural bias of their own corrupt minds, and the frightful example of immorality exhibited in the lives of planters, the slave remained from the conquest of the island by the British, in the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-five, till within about twenty years ago, or for a period of about one hundred and fifty years, unheeded, as to whether he was a worshipper of the moon, a disciple of the false prophet, or whether, like the Ephesians of old, he bowed down in the temple of the great goddess Diana. But things are no longer so. The successful labours of the missionaries soon roused the slumbering energies of the Established Church, to what she should have been foremost in attempting ; and to them, in a very considerable degree at least, is to be attributed, under the blessing of God, that moral change which has taken place in the Negro character from what it once was. And this was the principle with which the missionaries set out, of excluding from Church membership every individual whose manner of life was not strictly conformable to the Christian rule. The Negro must have dissolved every illegitimate connexion, as an evidence of the

sincerity with which he embraced the Christian faith, before the missionary would openly acknowledge and receive him into full communion ; and such was the effect produced by this wholesome discipline, that in a very little time the tone of morality was so raised among the slave population, that no one ever thought of claiming the privileges of discipleship until all these, and other pre-requisites of the Christian life, were faithfully adhered to. Hence, marriage, from having been altogether, or almost entirely unknown, or confined to particular districts, soon spread amongst the Negroes ; so that within twenty years, in districts where it had been entirely unknown, several thousand couple were married according to the prescribed rite of the Established Church. What the missionaries so auspiciously began, the clergy of the Church of England are now, with no less zeal in many cases, as efficiently carrying forward. Marriage is now becoming general amongst the slaves, and the greater respect in which the participators in this economy of domestic happiness are held by their fellow-servants over those who still continue in their heathenish state, is a most convincing proof how much marriage has contributed to promote their moral well-being and happiness, and in a considerable degree the interests of the planters themselves.

Whilst these pleasing changes, however, are in process, there is yet wanting, in order to a full confirmation of the benefits which the slave derives from them, such legal enactments as may not only protect his connubial rights from violation, but prevent him from being separated from the partner of his affection. It is somewhat paradoxical to think, that after the slave, with the full concurrence of his master, has been joined in wedlock, and after it has been declared by a lawfully appointed minister, "those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," he may the very next hour be torn from his bride, sold to the highest and best bidder, and separated from her to the remotest corner

of the land. Nor is there any law in existence at this moment to administer the slightest relief in a case of such an aggravated nature. Not that I believe separations often take place under such circumstances. Public opinion, in this matter at least, has done justice to the slave, and given it against the practice of separation. There are, however, instances in which they have happened ; nor is there any other hindrance to a frequent repetition of the evil, than that, so precarious in its tenure, the breath of public opinion. At any time, if so disposed, the proprietor may set up a family for sale "in lots to suit purchasers." The father may be torn from his child—the mother from her infant—the sister from the brother, and the brother from the sister's embrace—and the wife and the husband, though they may have been companions in suffering, and bearers of each other's misery for many years, and though they may have been settled with a numerous and a hopeful family, yet, by some untoward change in the circumstances of the estate, such as the death of a proprietor, or the embarrassment of his circumstances, or the passing of the estate into other hands, this once united family may, without any previous warning or preparation for the approaching evil, be scattered to the four winds of heaven, to meet on this side the grave no more. Surely, my Lord, this is an evil requiring prompt and complete reform. But the proprietor, and even the manager, possesses a further power, needing reform also. He may not only separate the slaves after marriage, but he may withhold his sanction to their marriage, and, without assigning any reason, stand in the way of their individual affection. It has been asserted that this power is necessary to check the licentious disposition of the slave, and to the moral government of an estate, as the planter must be the best judge whether the parties desiring marriage are free from any previous contract, and that without some such restraint there might be danger of introducing polygamy under the sanction of Christianity itself.

But these restrictions are no less impolitic than inexpedient. Every obstacle that stands in the way of their marriage should be completely removed, nor should any objection offered by the planter operate against the slave, unless backed by the concurrent testimony of the magistrate. It is not impossible, as such cases have happened, that a *master* might, from the most unworthy motives, resist the marriage of his female slave, and it were a hard case, surely, that the natural affections of a creature, already bound down by such weighty obligations, should be farther reduced to so cruel a subjection in order to gratify *his* mere caprice.

The protection of the connubial right of the slave, forms another subject for legislation. These rights may be violated with impunity. Instances have occurred in which they have been violated. It is not presumed that such cases are either common or notorious. It is to be hoped they are of very rare occurrence. But the freeman may offer this highest insult to the slave ; and if he be a master over him, he may, if necessary to the gratification of his sensual desires, imprison, punish, or otherwise oppress, in order to effect his purpose. It is high time, then, that a barrier should be raised against this system, and that a wall of defence should be planted around the connubial rights of the slave, such as neither the most vicious nor the most arbitrary should be able to overthrow. Nor can there be a single argument of the smallest weight offered against the passing of such an act, as would secure to the slave the fullest and the freest enjoyment of these privileges. It can in no way operate to the disadvantage of the planter. Far otherwise. It is a well-known fact, that on those estates where marriages have prevailed there has been a considerable increase in the population over that of former years, accompanied by a very marked improvement also in the manners and in the habits of the slave. These advantages unquestionably are on the side of the planter, as he will himself allow, although in

making the concession it conveys indirectly the severest censure, that the first practical lessons of the advantages resulting from Christianity should be taught him by his own slaves. I shall close this letter with an earnest appeal to your Grace as to the justice of a proposition which can injure no man, and may and must so highly conduce to the happiness of so many thousands.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.

PROTECTION OF THE SABBATH.

MY LORD,

By the constitution of England the Sabbath is acknowledged as a day of rest, and the law has attached to the violation of it, (however their exactions may have fallen into disuse,) pains and penalties. It were monstrous indeed, if, in a nation professedly Christian, the divine law, commanding the observance of the Sabbath as a holy day, should be set aside. It has, however, been recognised as a part of the law of the land, and all classes, from the lowest to the highest, participate in the advantages of it. As a day of rest from worldly toil and labour, it is peculiarly a blessing to the poor man, independently of those higher privileges which it confers upon him in common with others in the public ordinances of religion. But if the Sabbath prove thus a blessing to the poor cottager of Britain, how much more so must it not prove to the Negro Slave, who, worn out with six days' toil and care, in the unrequited service of another, tastes for a little season of the sweets and the privileges of freedom? But has the Negro a Sabbath on which to rest? This is a question often asked, and much controverted. It shall be answered briefly:—The Negro has *the semblance of a Sabbath*. By the Jamaica Slave Law, there are penalties attached to the working of sugar-mills on that day. The Act specifies, “That during the crop, not only shall the Slaves, as heretofore, be exempted from the labour of the estate or plantation on Sundays, but that no mills shall be put about or worked between the hours of seven o'clock on Saturday night, and five o'clock on Monday morning, under the penalty of £20, to be recovered against

the overseer or other person having the charge of such place." Such is the law on the subject; but what is the fact? Every one knows that sugar-mills are worked on the Sunday, and commonly at an early hour of the evening; that magistrates, as well as others, join in the violation of the law; and cases have been known to exist, wherein the very slaves in hospital have been turned out on the evening of the Sabbath, to supply the place of the Negroes absent at church, or at their grounds, and so worked until the others have returned to relieve them. Such is the Negro Sabbath.

By another clause of the Slave Law, the slave is allowed one day in every fortnight to cultivate his provision grounds, exclusive of Sundays, *except during crop time*, which often lasts six months of the year, and when, of course, the grounds must be laboured on Sunday, or the slave perish for want of food. Such is the Negro Sabbath.

Another clause tells us, "That no person whomsoever, shall employ the slaves of others, for any reward or hire to be paid to them, *on Sunday, without the consent in writing of the overseer first obtained*, under a penalty of five pounds." Thus may the slave be hired by others on Sunday, provided his master consents. Such is the Negro Sabbath.

By an estimate of the number of Sabbaths throughout the year on which the converted slaves are found to frequent public worship, and taken from the actual observations of the missionaries, it appears that they cannot attend oftener than about once in three or four weeks, or about thirteen times every year—the other Sabbaths being spent in providing food for their families; not to mention their occasional fatigue from the spell of the preceding night disqualifying them from attending. Such is the Negro Sabbath.

There are also a numerous class of persons, such as domestics, cattle-boys, shepherds, watchmen, &c. who seldom, and in many cases who never have an opportunity of attending religious worship, nor religious instruction of any kind—

not to particularise the numbers of slaves who, on sugar estates, are almost invariably employed to a late hour on the Sabbath mornings in "potting sugar," and, consequently, debarred from the public exercises of religion. Such is the Negro Sabbath.

Following in the train of these evils, next comes the Sunday market, to which the young and the old, for miles around, resort, to buy and sell, and barter their several commodities, consuming the entire day in going to and in returning from market, that they may dispose of their surplus provisions. Such is the Negro Sabbath.

The law requiring the master to allow his slave at least twenty-six days in the year, for the cultivation of his grounds, exclusive of the Sabbath—often, to suit his own purposes, the master takes that Sabbath from him, on which alone he could have had the opportunity of receiving *religious instruction*, repaying him with a week-day, without any such *privilege*. Such also is the Negro's Sabbath.

Thus, my Lord, the Negro has the semblance of a Sabbath; but it is such a Sabbath, as leaves him no other alternative but either to labour his grounds on that day, or starve; such a Sabbath as his master may deprive him of, under the pretext of repaying him with another day, (which it is believed he commonly does pay him)—such a Sabbath, as, even when spent to the best advantage, leaves him but a partial share of the blessings which it was designed to convey, and without any remedy whereby to secure to himself and to his family its fullest enjoyment.

Now, my Lord, the Slave Code of Jamaica professedly designs to give the Negro a Sabbath—a full, complete, and an entire Sabbath, for rest, and for religious instruction. The preamble in the seventh clause of that Act runs thus:—"Whereas it is expedient to *render the Sabbath as much as possible a day of rest, and for religious worship.*" The Jamaica legislature have expressed in these words all that is

required—that the Sabbath should, *as much as possible*, be made a day of rest, and for religious instruction. But how, under such circumstances, does the possibility exist, whilst Sunday-marketing, Sunday-labouring, and the toil incident to their being often overworked; precludes the slaves from attending public worship? In order to make the Sabbath what it should be, three important changes are necessary to be effected:—The Negro to be allowed every Saturday throughout the year for the cultivation of his grounds—Sunday markets to be entirely abolished—and night-work on sugar estates, that most deadly evil, to be altogether prohibited. A few individuals, more benevolent than others, have already effected the latter change, and found no reason to repent their having done so. Of all the evils to which the Negro is liable, throughout the whole system of slavery, there is not a greater than this—night-work on sugar estates. In proof of this, my Lord, only look at the facts to be found in a late return to Parliament, of the average increase and decrease of slaves for the five preceding years to 1828, on the principal properties in Jamaica, distinguishing coffee and other plantations from the sugar estates. We find from these returns, one sugar estate with 663 slaves, on which there has been an average annual decrease of *ten*. On another, with 242 slaves, a decrease of *fifteen*; and on a third, called Blue Mountain, the still more fearful waste of human life discovered, in an *average decrease of seventeen Negroes annually out of 314*—or *eighty-five slaves, being equal to one-fifth of the whole population, cut off in the space of five years!* The estates of the heirs of John Thorp, situated in the parish of Trelauney, shew a diminution of numbers, within the same period, amounting to two hundred, out of a population of 2809. But on the coffee plantations, where night-work is unknown, mark the contrast: on a plantation having 214 slaves, *the average increase* for five years is three per cent. per annum; and, taking an extensive parish, the staple commo-

dity of which is coffee, the average increase throughout is not less than three per cent. per annum. Can there be a more convincing proof of the shocking waste to which human life is subject on sugar estates, (and owing mainly to the system of night-work,) than this? And yet to such a system must the man of grey hairs, or the mother of a numerous offspring, after toiling throughout the day under the scorching beams of a tropical sun, submit; and again be exposed to the bleak north wind, to the chilling mists of heaven, or to the pelting rain; and, when overtaken with sleep, to lie down faint and weary, and at the risk of a heavy punishment, under the great canopy of heaven, without another comforter, save Him who pities the oppressed. This evil, in common with Sunday-marketing, must be annihilated before the Negro can know the full privilege of a Christian Sabbath. The law must stipulate, fully and clearly, the duration of Negro labour—unless, indeed, we would perpetuate a system of national suicide, and tolerate the farther continuance of an evil, which is annually sweeping into the eternal world so many hundred souls.

And who, my Lord, would suffer from an act so gracious and so merciful? Surely not the planter. By the abolishing of Sunday markets he is no loser. He would, upon his own showing, “render the Sabbath as much as possible a day of rest;” and which it cannot ever be considered, whilst Sunday trafficking absorbs the minds of by far the greater portion of all classes of the community. The concession will amount to twenty-six days in the year. But what of this, when the numerous advantages resulting therefrom, to both master and slave, are fairly and impartially considered? And with regard to night-work, the quality of the sugar manufactured by the half-awakened Negro, can bear no comparison with what is carefully and diligently prepared under the broad light of day; and especially when it is considered that, for this half-boiled and ill-refined produce, the same tax

awaits the planter in the mother country, as would be paid for an article of the purest manufacture ; to say nothing of the so frequent thefts and depredations committed by the slaves in the boiling and curing houses, when the drowsy or drunken book-keeper is off his guard. No ; it will be for the planter to reduce the extent of his cane-field—to pay a more marked attention to the improvement and quality of his sugars—to endeavour to preserve his capital—to lessen all his contingencies to the lowest possible standard ; and, by such means, bring the labour of the estate to the level of his own resources ; and find, in the event, the consolation of making the burthen of his slave comparatively light, and easy to be borne.

But, my Lord, as in all the other improvements upon the slave system already suggested, so in this case likewise must your powerful interposition come in to effect these benevolent and necessary changes, or leave them undone. Be assured, however, of this, that it will be better, easier, and safer to effect them now, and by an Act of Parliament, than it probably may be in a few years, should some of those sparks of liberty, that are now flying throughout the world, descend upon the combustible materials of which the West is composed, and kindle such a flame, as may yet cause England to sigh over the tardiness of her humanity.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

MY LORD,

The appointment of bishops to control and superintend the affairs of the West Indian church, proves the anxiety of the British government that the slaves should have the freest access to the means devised for their religious instruction. This measure, so truly desirable and important, was adopted with the free concurrence of all parties. The bishops, on landing in the islands, were received with every demonstration of respect; and wherever they went, in the discharge of their official duties, the same degree of deference every where awaited them. In order to the exercise of their ecclesiastical functions, it was necessary that many of the existing laws relating to the government of the clergy should be repealed, a measure which was readily adopted by the local legislators with the least possible delay, and every obstacle that stood in the way of their having the fullest and the most commanding influence over the clergy was removed. Thus far it would seem as if the West India church was prepared for the performance of a great work, since it possessed all the machinery that was necessary for carrying into effect the benevolent designs of the British government. But mark the mistake. Not a single obstacle that stood in the way of the religious instruction of the slave was set aside. The master continued to maintain an authority as absolute over the soul as over the body of the slave. He continued to possess the power of repelling all religious teachers from his estate, no one daring, without his authority, not the mitre excepted, to set foot upon it, even on Sundays or Negro-days, to preach, or

teach, or otherwise to infringe upon his prerogative. And in this state things remain in Jamaica at this very hour. The consequence is, that few masters will consent to have their slaves instructed at all ; that the instruction given, in ninety-nine out of one hundred cases, is merely *oral* ; and that the simple boon of permitting them to learn to read is withheld by their superiors. And why, my Lord ? The man who would perpetuate the evils of slavery, and farther entail them upon unborn generations, is perfectly consistent in such opposition. Knowledge is power : and could the slaves be held in their original blindness, there would be nothing to hinder the master, whilst such ignorance prevailed, from maintaining the same sovereign and undisturbed authority which he has been wont to do. But in these days of light, it were impossible to preclude it from breaking in here and there upon the Negro mind, although the utmost precautions were adopted for keeping it from him. Knowledge the slave will have, whether his master will or not ; and hence it more deeply concerns the planter to see that he is instructed in right principles. There is a powerful evidence that may be adduced in order to prove the superiority of knowledge (when tempered by religious instruction) in preserving the peace and the security of the colonies. It is a fact which cannot be disputed, and that may be proved to the satisfaction of your Grace, that *in no single instance in the island of Jamaica, has a solitary case been known of treason or rebellion being charged against any of the Negro slaves who have been in church communion with the ministers of the Establishment, of the Moravian, of the Wesleyan, nor, as far as can be ascertained, of the Baptist persuasions.* Whilst it is notorious, that in those districts where rebellion has raised its antichristian arm, there has been either a want of fidelity on the part of the resident clergy, or the unhappy slaves who have been deluded into conspiracies, have been cut off from the means of religious instruction, as well as

from a participation in those Christian privileges placed within reach of their more fortunate brethren. This assertion is not made unadvisedly ; and the fact is put forth as a powerful argument why—on the grounds of both political expediency, and of the personal well-being and security of the whole population of the West India islands—the Negro should have the most uncontrolled access to every authorised religious teacher.

In the island of Antigua, the Negroes have for a long time enjoyed, in a considerable degree, these advantages. The missionaries have had access to the slaves at their own houses, and under the sanction of their masters : chapels of the rudest construction, which, in the simple language of the people have been termed “praise houses,” have been erected by the slaves themselves, where the missionaries have been permitted to attend their followers, at whatever season may suit the convenience of all parties. And what has been the result ? Have either discord, or insubordination, or rebellion ensued ? Certainly not. That island presents to the world, at this very moment, a pattern of what real religion can effect, upon the mind of man under every possible circumstance of his being. But in Jamaica, things are far otherwise. There, the representatives of comparatively very few estates, tolerate the labours of the Christian teacher, and still fewer would admit him to that confidential intercourse with the slave in his own dwelling which has been already noticed. Nay more, it has sometimes happened that proprietors,—and *they females too*,—less humane than their own resident agents, have expelled the minister without assigning any cause ; thus preventing him from pursuing his Christian labours on the estate, although the instruction so imparted was without cost, given by a minister of the Establishment, merely oral, and usually during the hours of recreation allotted to the slave. Can it be wondered at then, my Lord, that any general attempt to teach the slave to read,

should be construed into an act little short of treason. That by many of the planters, the sight of a book in a Negro's hand, should be viewed with much the same feelings of indignant suspicion, as the Roman Catholic priest would eye the possession of a Bible by an Irish peasant.

Let these obstacles, then, to the religious instruction of the slave, be done away for ever. Concede to every minister of the Establishment, the freest access, at all times, to the slaves, on their own plantations. And to every missionary, and to every school-master and mistress, producing satisfactory testimonials, to the lawfully constituted authorities, let the same freedom of admission be also extended. Should a presumption at any time arise, against any of these individuals, of their having exceeded the limits prescribed by their office, by inculcating in the minds of the slaves, principles or precepts at variance with the peace of society, then let them be made amenable to justice, and let that justice be armed with a tenfold penalty against them. Nor let it be forgotten, that if such were the design of the missionaries, to unsettle the Negro mind, and to rouse him to revenge his wrongs, the die would long ere this have been cast with the British colonies, and a flame would have been kindled, which not all the artifice of man could have extinguished ; and the chain that binds the slave would have fallen off for ever. But maligned as the missionaries have been, and misinterpreted as their proceedings are, such is not their office, as the peaceful, and civilizing, and practical effects already produced through their instrumentality on the lives of so many thousands, abundantly testify. Yes, my Lord, if there were not a British bayonet within the whole confines of slavery, strange as the assertion may seem to be, the Christian missionaries alone, with free access to the objects of their benevolence, would stem the torrent of discord at the fountain, and prove to their country a protection against every internal commotion.

Remove, then, the various impediments to the instruction of the slave at present existing, and Britain shall yet rejoice in the prosperity of her colonies. Leave them as they now are, and I will venture to predict that twenty years shall not have expired, till they shall be lost to her for ever.

I have the honour to be, my Lord.

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.

PROSPECTIVE EMANCIPATION.

MY LORD,

Having already glanced at the more prominent changes which it is desirable to effect in the slave system, I might now bring these letters to a close, were it not necessary to say a few words in considering what is to be the future condition of the Negro, and to inquire whether slavery, under even a mitigated form, must continue to exist for an indefinite period. I do not think, my Lord, that this is possible. I hold it to be beyond the power of Great Britain herself, even were she to back the colonies in their attempts to uphold slavery, that it can stand. The world is at present pregnant with changes—revolution has already winged her flight over a great portion of the Continent of Europe ; and in the new world the march of liberty has advanced, is advancing, and must continue (from the very elements of which the materials which constitute society are composed) still to advance, till slavery and oppression, of whatever kind or character, shall be heard of no more. What, then, is to be done ? The interest of Britain, and the interest of the planters, consist in looking these probable dangers and difficulties fairly in the face, and devising before the clouds gather and the tempest is howling around them, such measures as, under existing circumstances, and in the good providence of God, may avert the evil, and conduce to the good of all. There is, however, so much of party, and so much of an intemperate zeal, and of a zeal without knowledge, mixed up in the affair, that the government of the country, with every desire to redress the evils of slavery, is embarrassed and confounded with the difficulties of the case

which present themselves on every side. Instant and unqualified emancipation ! say some. To such a proposition the government will not, and the government cannot listen, unless, indeed, they are not alive to the evils that would ensue from instant and unqualified reform and revolution in their own country. Others more temperately contend for something of a prospective nature : their suggestion is at once to purchase the *female slaves*. A measure of this kind, doubtless, would soon put an end to the evils of slavery ; but where is the money ? Four hundred thousand slaves, at fifty pounds each, would amount, in round numbers, to twenty millions of money ! This, in the present state of things, your Grace will perceive to be altogether impracticable. Others there are, again, who recommend that all children born after a certain day should be declared free. The design is both good and humane, but how far capable of being acted upon ? Granting the emancipation of slave children, let it be asked, who is henceforth, and especially during the period of their infancy, to clothe, feed, protect, and otherwise to provide for these children ? The master refuses to do so, and even to lodge them. The mother is still a slave—her time is occupied in the service of her master—she cannot either watch over, support, or otherwise provide for these little ones, unless some additional time and means are allowed her for that purpose. What, then, is to be done ? Build nurseries, say some, at the public expense. Well ? The mother refuses to part with her child, and so the design falls to the ground. The question is full of difficulty.

Another proposition may be suggested :—Let all children born of slaves after the 31st of December next, be born *apprentices*. Let their term of apprenticeship continue for fifteen or twenty years, during which period, in lieu of services, the master must clothe, feed, and otherwise support them, as he is at present bound to do—only let him be re-

lieved from taxes of every kind on their account. At the expiration of the term of fifteen or twenty years, let them farther be apprenticed for a period of ten years longer, at a certain rate of wages to be hereafter decided upon; and, at the expiration of the ten years, the supposition is, that the Negro would become a free labourer, having already contracted such habits as would render the change, from a state of apprenticeship to that of perfect freedom, hardly perceptible. In a plan of this kind it would be necessary to provide for the support of such poor creatures as sickness or bodily infirmities might disqualify from labouring. Such cases, however, would be comparatively few, and the difficulty of providing for them would be of minor account. Such is the nature of the proposition adverted to.

With respect, however, to the present race of Negroes, the question is much more difficult to be decided, nor can I see any way, without actually abandoning the colonies to anarchy and confusion by an indiscriminate and immediate emancipation, whereby they can be included in the benefits that have been contemplated for the next generation; with this exception, that if the British legislature will frame a law comprehending the ample and full enjoyment of the privileges adverted to in these letters, with such others as may have been inadvertently passed over, slavery will then, in a very considerable degree, have been bereft of its sting, and a new era of happiness and privilege will dawn upon the long-oppressed inhabitants of the western world. But whatever may be the ultimatum of the British government with regard to the utter extinction of slavery, it is of importance to remember, that no prospective benefits can possibly supersede the expediency and the necessity of instant amelioration, and that to the full extent, at least, of the measures which have been already proposed. The circumstances of the case at present demand an open avowal on the part of government of what their intentions really are. The

people of England look for this ; and surely it would be but justice towards the individuals unhappily possessing slave property, candidly to intimate to them the actual intentions of the mother country ; to set the matter at rest by adopting this method of plain dealing with the colonies, that confidence may be again restored, and the minds of the slaves, so long agitated by the conflicting and angry broils of party, may be settled into a state of peaceful tranquillity.

But matters cannot possibly remain longer as they are: indeed it has been almost miraculous how, amidst the open and avowed enmity of the colonists towards the mother country, and the abuse so openly lavished upon their best friends, that the slaves should have been so little affected by it. But it can hardly be expected, that as the crisis approaches which is to decide whether arbitrary rule or Christian moderation shall preside over the future government of the slave, that their minds will not participate in the agitation which surrounds them. The people of England, my Lord, you know too well to suppose that they will ever relax in their efforts, constitutionally and perseveringly, to effect their object ; nor are you so unacquainted with the resistance offered by the West India legislatures to the reasonable demands of the mother country, as not to know that such resistance will not be overcome, but by a bold and determined resolution of the British government to legislate for the public good, independently of all consequences.

On you, then, my Lord, the eyes of the British empire are fixed, looking through your Grace's promptitude and decision, to the final settlement of this great question. You have already, in the face of an opposition infinitely more powerful than any which the united efforts of the whole West Indian body can produce, legislated for Ireland. Use but the same decision in overturning, not by violence, nor by wrong, nor robbery, the accumulated evils which now affect the slave, and your name will descend to the grave blessed

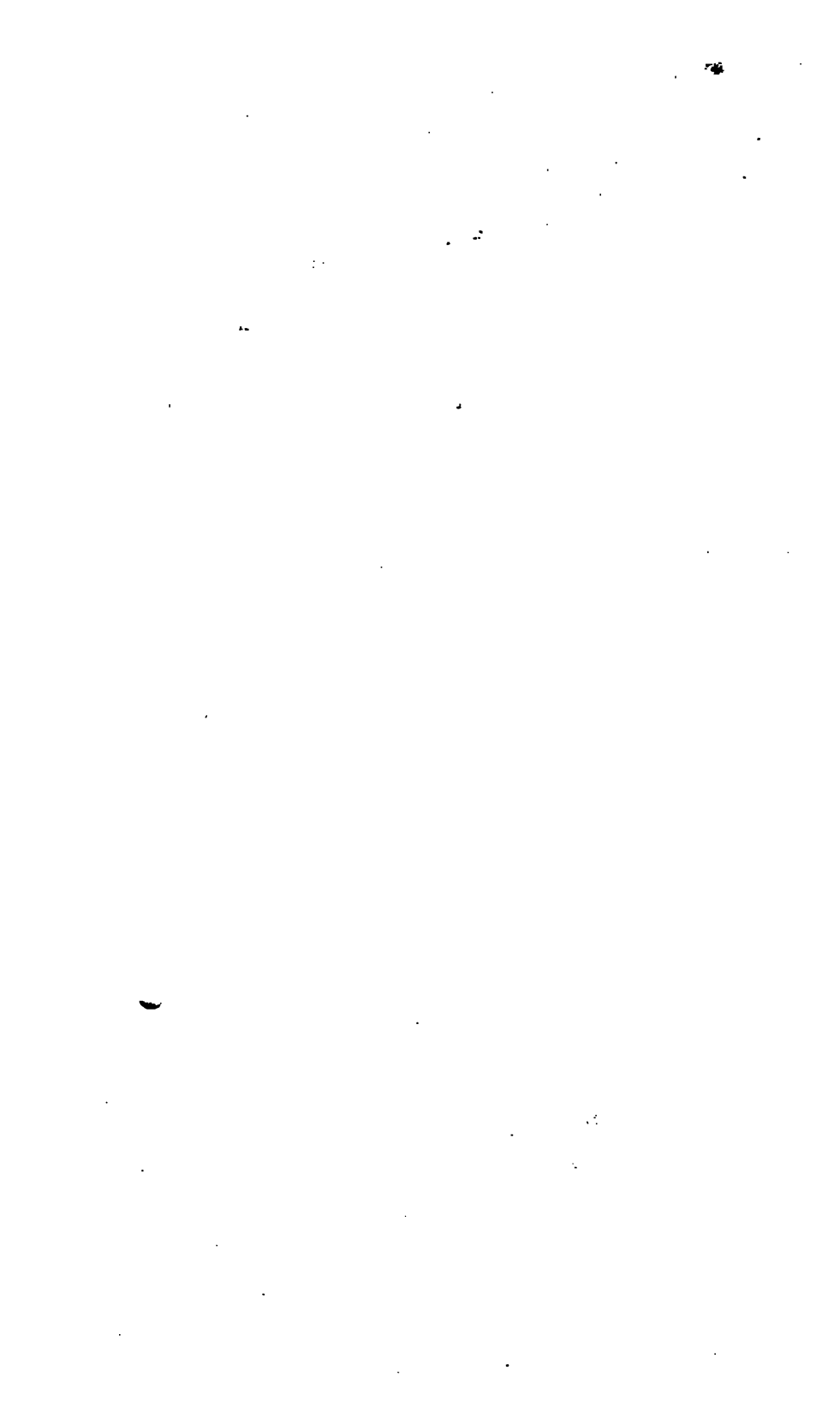
by the acclamations of thousands. The free-born African shall hence be taught to lisp the name of WELLINGTON, and over the trophies which shall yet commemorate the day of Waterloo, there shall be seen, entwined by the hands of two Negro slaves, a laurel and an olive branch, with this device :

He was our deliverer.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

&c. &c. &c.

IGNOTUS.



[REDACTED]





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